NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
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AL GRIGIS

MICRONESIA'S FUTURE

ANNCR:

A REFERENDUM HAS BROUGHT THE INHABITANTS OF MICRONESIA SOMEWHAT CLOSER TO UNIFIED POLITICAL ACTION, ALTHOUGH THE FUTURE OF THE ISLANDS IS STILL TO BE CLEARLY DEFINED. VOA'S AL GRIGIS REVIEWS THE RECENT VOTE FOR FEDERATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS.

VOICE:

THE TWO THOUSAND-ODD ISLANDS IN THE PACIFIC OCEAN KNOWN AS MICRONESIA ARE WIDELY SCATTERED IN AN ARC EAST OF THE PHILIPPINES. ONLY 96 OF THE ISLANDS ARE INHABITED, AND THE DISTANCES BETWEEN THEM HAVE LONG HINDRED PRACTICAL UNITY AMONG THE 110 THOUSAND PEOPLE WHO LIVE ON THEM. AS A CONSEQUENCE, THE MICRONESIANS ALSO HAVE REMAINED DIVIDED LINGUISTICALLY AND ETHNICALLY AS WELL AS PHYSICALLY.

FOLLOWING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, THE ISLANDS WERE DESIGNATED AS A STRATEGIC TRUST OF THE UNITED NATIONS, AND THE UNITED STATES WAS GRANTED SOLE ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITY AS THE AGENT OF THE U.N. IN SEQUENCE, THE THREE MAJOR GROUPS OF ISLANDS COMPROMISING MICRONESIA -- THE MARIANAS, CAROLINES AND MARSHALLS -- WERE OFFERED COMMONWEALTH STATUS BY THE UNITED STATES IN 1970. THE CONGRESS OF MICRONESIA, HOWEVER, TURNED DOWN THE OFFER, AND FOUR YEARS LATER, ACTING ON THEIR OWN, THE MARIANAS ACCEPTED. STATUS AS A COMMONWEALTH WOULD COME WHEN THE TRUSTEESHIP ENDS, PROBABLY IN 1981. (OPT) AND AT SUCH TIME, THE PEOPLE IN THE MARIANAS WILL BE U.S. CITIZENS WITH MOST OF THE RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS OF OTHER AMERICANS, EXCEPT FOR VOTING REPRESENTATION IN THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS AND DIRECT PARTICIPATION IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. (END OPT)

THEN, LAST MONTH, IN A REFERENDUM FOR A CONSTITUTION WHICH WOULD CREATE A NEW FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA, THE VOTES FOR APPROVAL CAME FROM FOUR DISTRICTS IN THE CAROLINES, WHILE A FIFTH DISTRICT IN THE CAROLINES, PALAU, AND THE SIXTH IN THE MARSHALL ISLANDS DISAPPROVED. THE TWO DISSENTING DISTRICTS THEREBY EXPRESSED A DESIRE TO SEEK A SEPARATE STATUS WITH THE UNITED STATES OUTSIDE THE FEDERATION.

THE RESULTS SEEMINGLY REFLECT CONTINUING DIFFERENCES AMONG THE ISLANDERS AND WOULD KEEP MICRONESIA POLITICALLY DIVIDED IN THREE PARTS -- THE MARIANAS WITH COMMONWEALTH LEANINGS, THE GREATER PORTION OF THE CAROLINES ASKING FOR A FEDERATION, AND PALAU AND THE MARSHALLS SEEKING RENOGIATIONS WHICH WOULD GIVE THEM COMMONWEALTH STATUS, OR SOMETHING SIMILAR TO IT.

THE STORY, HOWEVER, DOES NOT END HERE. THERE IS A REPORT THAT THE REFERENDUM RESULTS IN PALAU MAY BE CHALLENGED IN COURT BY THE PRO-CONSTITUTION GROUPS WHO ALLEGE FRAUD WAS COMMITTED BY THE SEPARATIST FORCES. ONE CHARGE IS LIKELY TO BE THAT AMONG THE BALLOTS COLLECTED BY AIRPLANE AND BOAT FROM THE PARTICIPATING DISTRICTS 750 WERE MISSING. THE RESULTS FROM PALAU ALSO SHOWED THAT THE MARGIN REJECTING THE FEDERATION WAS ABOUT 600 VOTES. AND SHOULD THE MISSING BALLOTS BE FOUND AND REVERSE THE VOTE IN PALAU, THERE IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT MICRONESIA IS EVEN CLOSER TO UNITY THAN IT WOULD APPEAR.

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